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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MOSCOW 001077

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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USDA FAS FOR OSTA/MACKE, WRIGHT, ROSENBLUM;
- OCRA/FLEMINGS; OA/PATRICK CLERKIN
HHS FOR COURY, STEIGER
FAS PASS FSIS AND APHIS
SECDEF FOR OSD
STATE FOR G/AIAG, EB/TPP/ATP, EB/TPP/BTA, OES/STC
VIENNA PASS APHIS/TANAKA, BRUSSELS PASS
- APHIS/FERNANDEZ
USDOC 3150/DAVID FULTON/MOLLY COSTA/ITA/CS/OIO/EUR
GENEVA PASS HEALTH ATTACHE
DEPARTMENT PASS USAID FOR GH/RCS/EE/ROSENBERG
CDC ATLANTA PASS SEPRL FOR DAVID SUAREZ

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KFLU](#) [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: CLOSELY WATCHED BIRDS: RUSSIA'S RESPONSE TO AVIAN AND
PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

REFS: A. Moscow 1000
[1](#)B. Vladivostok 39
[1](#)C. 07 Moscow 5929
[1](#)D. 07 Moscow 1677
[1](#)E. 06 Moscow 10955
[1](#)F. 07 Moscow 1318
[1](#)G. 07 Moscow 3379

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Russia has been effective in stamping out nearly 150 outbreaks of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza (AI) among poultry over the last three years through a combination of strict quarantines and mass cullings in outbreak areas, and large-scale vaccinations of commercial and backyard bird flocks throughout the country. Russia has an effective animal and human disease surveillance network and the laboratory capacity to quickly identify highly pathogenic flu strains following suspected AI outbreaks. At the same time, Russia has not yet completed a national pandemic preparedness plan and has struggled to provide the public with consistent information during outbreaks. A lack of coordination and rivalries among the country's leading animal and human disease institutes and laboratories could hinder the response to a pandemic, and Russia has been reluctant to share AI virus samples with international health institutes. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Despite lying along several avian migratory flyways through Eastern Europe and Asia, Russia has effectively stamped out nearly 150 outbreaks of avian influenza (AI) among domestic poultry over the last three years. (Sitreps on these outbreaks are posted on the embassy's classified website: www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/moscow/) Russia has adopted a "scorched earth" policy of mass culling in outbreak areas. In some cases, entire bird populations on farms have been destroyed, rather than individual populations in single chicken houses, in order to contain infections and punish commercial farmers who, in the authorities' view, failed to meet minimum biosafety standards (Ref C).

13. (U) Russia has vaccinated commercial and backyard flocks against AI, inoculating millions of birds in both 2006 and 2007. During the recent outbreak in the Russian Far East (Refs A, B), local law enforcement officials quickly established a quarantine around the affected village while the government veterinary service destroyed dozens of birds and vaccinated thousands of domestic poultry in the area. As an additional precaution, the farmer, whose chickens were originally infected, was placed in a local hospital for several days of observation, where he has received antiviral medicine, although he so far has no flu symptoms (Ref B).

14. (SBU) Over the last three years, the federal government has paid for vaccine production to support mass bird inoculation campaigns at commercial farms, but it is less clear who will pay for the continuing expenses of large-scale vaccinations. While the federal government is willing to continue paying for vaccine production, there is no federal budget to pay for the continuing costs of mass inoculations, leaving regional or local governments to bear those

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costs in the future. Agricultural contacts report that some poultry farms are vaccinating their commercial flocks with expired vaccines produced last year, which raises obvious questions about how effective these vaccination campaigns will be in protecting commercial flocks from future infections.

15. (SBU) Russia has a strong veterinary surveillance system for highly pathogenic AI (HPAI), but unlike the United States, there is no surveillance of low pathogenic AI (LPAI) strains. This systemic flaw leaves Russia unable to identify reservoirs of LPAI among birds that could potentially mutate into HPAI.

16. (SBU) Despite the success at stamping out avian outbreaks, the government's public statements have sometimes been uncoordinated. Local, regional and federal officials, as well as leading human health and veterinary officials, have sometimes provided conflicting or irresponsible statements to the press. In some cases, federal health officials have announced an AI outbreak before lab results confirmed the presence of AI. Regional officials and certain elected federal officials have periodically made irresponsible statements on the origin of outbreaks and sought to attribute them to trade-related sabotage by foreign governments (Ref D).

Pandemic Preparedness

17. (SBU) In 2007, the GOR prepared and submitted to the WHO a draft pandemic preparedness plan, but the document still needs substantial reworking. Several regions affected by AI have drafted pandemic preparedness plans and submitted them to the federal government for review, but the GOR has not yet approved these plans or attempted to coordinate and make them consistent with the draft federal preparedness plan. Russia has worked steadily to strengthen AI surveillance and testing capacity. In 2006, Russia approved an action plan to spend nearly \$49 million combating the further spread of AI, with the Ministries of Agriculture and of Health and Social Development receiving the lion's share of the funds to produce and purchase vaccines and to improve laboratory capacity (Ref F).

18. (SBU) The GOR has applied to establish the "Vector" State

Research Center of Virology and Biotechnology in Novosibirsk Oblast as a World Health Organization (WHO) reference laboratory and collaborating center for AI. (Russia already has WHO collaborating centers for all types of human influenza virus in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and the Federal Center for Animal Health in Vladimir is the national reference laboratory for animal diseases, but Vector would serve as a special WHO collaborating center for AI.) A WHO assessment team visited Vector in April 2007 and concluded that the laboratory could eventually become a WHO collaborating center for AI research, but that this process could take as long as two years (Ref G).

¶9. (SBU) Over the last two years, Russia has established itself as the leader within the CIS on AI and pandemic preparedness, executing bilateral influenza collaboration agreements with many of the other CIS countries, hosting numerous regional influenza conferences, and sponsoring training sessions for CIS flu and laboratory experts (Refs F, G).

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¶10. (SBU) AI sample sharing remains a thorny issue for Russia. The country has accepted AI samples from both Western Europe and the CIS, but has not shared any AI samples collected in Russia beyond its borders. For routine human influenza cases, Russia has historically exchanged information and provided virus samples to the CDC and other WHO Collaborating Centers. We are also not aware of any sharing of AI samples beyond Russia's borders through the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). For AI samples, in 2007, Vector provided the CDC with DNA material and sera from humans who had contact with sick birds during the 2005 AI outbreak in the Novosibirsk region. Officials at Vector would like to share virus isolates with both CDC and with the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. However, Vector's supervisory agency, the Federal Surveillance Service for Consumer Rights Protection and Human Well-Being, has not yet granted the lab permission to share samples abroad, though the lab is expecting it will receive permission. In 2006, Russia dropped its legal objections to sharing AI samples, but we are not aware of any cases in which AI samples have actually been shared outside of Russia since then. Health officials maintained from 2004-2006 that Russian law prohibited the sharing of AI samples, because they are included in a list of dangerous pathogens that cannot be exported. The reluctance to share samples with the outside world is probably a legacy of the closed and secretive culture at both human and animal research institutes, many of which worked on biological weapons programs during the Soviet Union and remain closed facilities even today.

¶11. (SBU) In September 2006, the St. Petersburg Institute of Influenza announced that a human vaccine developed from the AI strain that circulated in Vietnam from 2004-2005 had successfully completed the first phase of trials (Ref E). At the Sixth International Bird Flu Summit in Bali on March 27, 2008, Russia's leading state-owned vaccine manufacturer, Microgen, said it had developed two additional human AI vaccines and was prepared to establish vaccine production in Southeast Asia, if necessary.

¶12. (SBU) A lack of coordination and rivalries among Russia's leading veterinary and human influenza labs could hinder Russia's response to AI and pandemic flu. Senior management at the Research Institute of Influenza in St. Petersburg, Russia's leading human influenza lab, has been irritated by the spending of lavish sums to develop Vector's AI capacity. Vector also has not cooperated with the Federal Center for Animal Health in Vladimir, Russia's premier veterinary diagnostic and testing lab. Although the Vladimir center is supposed to take the lead role in AI outbreaks among birds, Vector has in some cases conducted preliminary testing of specimens from birds and then not shared those samples with the Vladimir lab (Ref G). There is no standing committee of agriculture and health officials and specialists that could help facilitate coordination among Russia's leading agriculture and health institutes.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Given the budgetary grumbling over the expenses of continued mass bird vaccinations and the lack of any evident political will to focus on reworking Russia's draft pandemic

preparedness plan, we believe a certain amount of "bird flu fatigue" has infected Russia's leading animal and human health officials and policy makers. Nonetheless, we believe Russia will continue to react quickly to AI outbreaks, given the track record of effective responses over the last three years, and the country's evident

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strengths in surveillance, testing, and vaccine production.

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